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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 002463

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [AMGT](#) [EAID](#) [PARM](#) [MCAP](#) [KPAL](#) [SA](#) [IZ](#) [YM](#) [ICC](#) [DPRK](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#) [ECON](#) [COM](#)

SUBJECT: NEA A/S BURNS OCTOBER 4 MEETING WITH SALEH: CT
COOPERATION; ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE; YEMENI-SAUDI CT EFFORTS;
ARTICLE 98; DIPLOMATIC POUCH

REF: A. SANAA 2440

[1](#)B. SANAA 2410

[1](#)C. SANAA 1990

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: In a 10/4 meeting with President Saleh, NEA A/S Burns welcomed U.S.-Yemeni CT cooperation and supported U.S. assistance for Yemen's security and development. Saleh briefed on expanding Saudi-Yemeni CT cooperation, which he characterized as better than ever before, despite (according to him) occasional Saudi foot-dragging and a continuing flow of terrorist financing flowing from the KSA. Burns stressed the need for an Article 98 agreement. Saleh asked for a Powell-Qirbi letter on the subject to help the ROYG reach a positive response. In a discussion of long-running problems with the diplomatic pouch and diplomatic support flights for Embassy Sanaa, Saleh expressed lingering concerns over the volume and non-transparency of shipments. A/S Burns underscored the need for cooperation to ensure that the 10/5 support flight would succeed and set a positive model for the future. In a private exchange at the meeting's end, Burns reiterated the U.S. call for Yemen to sever cooperation with North Korea. Saleh agreed in principle, but cited ongoing talks on the "defective" SCUDs Yemen received from the DPRK last winter. Saleh and Burns also exchanged views on Iraq and Palestine. Septel reports A/S Burns' earlier meeting with FM Qirbi. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) NEA A/S Burns, accompanied by Ambassador, DCM and Pol/Econ Chief (notetaker) called on President Saleh 10/4/03 during Burns' 1 1/2-day stay in Yemen. Saleh received the U.S. delegation in a recently restored old Turkish military garrison known locally as "the new Pentagon." MFA staffers confirmed afterward that Saleh intends to use the site as an alternate venue for high-level meetings, and that the meeting with A/S Burns marked the first time he had done so.

SALEH: IMPROVEMENT IN COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION WARRANTS
INCREASED ECONOMIC AID

[1](#)3. (C) Noting that the August visit to Washington DC by Presidential Advisor Abdelkarim al-Iryani was fruitful, Saleh quickly shifted to the progress that Yemen has made in combating terrorism. Pointing to the ROYG's recent success in disrupting an al-Qaida cell in Sanaa (ref a), Saleh expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S. media and urged the USG to be cautious about sharing information with the media while Yemen is still trying to track down all parts of the cell. He maintained that the leaking of information has had a negative impact on the flow of European tourism and investment to Yemen.

[1](#)4. (C) Saleh criticized the USG for not providing economic assistance commensurate with Yemen's contribution to counter-terrorism efforts. A/S Burns pointed out that Saleh had voiced a similar concern about CT assistance a year or two earlier, but that the CT relationship was now well established. He said a similar positive trend was underway with respect to economic assistance, and would grow and become increasingly visible over time as Yemen made progress on its own economic reforms. Saleh re-emphasized the need for economic assistance, commenting that the U.S. is a superpower and should overlook small mistakes and concentrate on the fact that it needs allies in the region. He recalled that he was the first Arab leader to visit Washington after 9/11, and suggested that the U.S. convince Saudi Arabia to exempt Yemen from its debts as a further economic assistance measure.

[1](#)5. (C) A/S Burns noted that he had headed the U.S. del at the 10/02 World Bank-sponsored Coordinating Group meeting in Paris. Saleh interjected that Burns' "excellent" speech had been the best at the event and positively influenced the meeting outcome. Underscoring U.S. commitment to expanding economic assistance to Yemen, Burns noted that Yemen has to date been the number one beneficiary of program funding under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). He continued that Yemen may also qualify to benefit from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) if it moves forward on essential reforms, e.g. in civil service, the judiciary and corruption. Burns urged Saleh to move ahead decisively in these areas. Saleh asserted that the World Bank, the IMF and the USG need

to understand Yemen's problems, including the population explosion, absence of tourism, limited oil revenues and limited export markets for Yemeni goods.

16. (C) A/S Burns referred to U.S. support for the nascent Yemeni Coast Guard, including the delivery of EDA patrol craft set for January 2004. Saleh half-jokingly suggested that the U.S. provide Yemen 15-20 new vessels from the UAE shipyards, as this would be faster and cheaper than the old, refurbished craft the USG was sending. Saleh complained that Yemeni CT cooperation with the United States had caused the international community to criticize the ROYG's human rights record. A/S Burns responded that Yemen has moved ahead in some areas, such as women's rights and increased voter registration, and had a self-interest in showing the same determination in other areas of civil society and political freedoms. This was not a favor to the U.S., but a step forward for Yemenis.

NEW AL-QAIDA LEADERSHIP; SAUDI ARABIA IS A "DEN" FOR HIDING TERRORISTS

17. (S/NF) A/S Burns asked Saleh's assessment of recently expanded security cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Saleh said it was good, and that recent exchanges of information and of prisoners was very positive. Nevertheless, the KSA remains a "den" in which terrorists find safe hideouts, and cutting off Saudi-origin funding for terrorism must be a priority. Saleh revealed that he had envisioned a three-way meeting with Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Mohamed bin Naif to correspond with the recently postponed visit to Yemen by FBI Director Mueller. He said he still hoped to arrange such a session when Mueller's visit is rescheduled. Saleh noted that the ROYG killed seven Saudis in recent clashes in al-Jawf, Marib and Houdeidah and that he has passed their names to Mohamed bin Naif. Saleh passed Ambassador Hull the name Ali al Hajj, who he said had replaced al-Nasheri as new head of al-Qaida operations in the Arabian peninsula).

18. (C) Saleh commented the May bombings had an "excellent" effect on the SAG, as the Saudis are now focused on CT as they never were previously. Asked by AMB Hull to specify Yemen's coordinator for the expanding cooperation with the Saudis, Saleh named two: Interior Minister Alimi handles the relationship on a political level, while PSO chief Gamish handles details -- e.g. exchange of telephone numbers, names and other information on terrorist suspects. In response, Ambassador noted that Alimi was upbeat on cooperation with the Saudis, while Gamish told us privately that it was unproductive. Saleh responded that Gamish was "sensitive" because the Saudis were often slow to respond to specific requests for information -- e.g. the KSA's slow response to Yemen's long-standing request for extraditions. Nevertheless, said Saleh, overall Saudi-Yemeni CT cooperation is better than at any time in the past.

ARTICLE 98: REQUEST FOR POWELL-QIRBI LETTER

19. (C) A/S Burns emphasized the importance of reaching a U.S.-Yemeni agreement on Article 98 promptly, since Yemeni ratification of the ICC treaty without such an agreement in place could trigger curtailment of U.S. assistance. Saleh initially said that Yemen was "opposed," but quickly backed off as A/S Burns elaborated on the issue. Saleh asked that an official letter be sent from Secretary Powell to FM Qirbi spelling out the issue (once again) and the steps Yemen needed to take. A/S Burns agreed that the USG would provide such a letter. Saleh concluded that the ROYG would consider the matter carefully and hopefully offer a positive response.

DIPLOMATIC POUCH/DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FLIGHTS

110. (C) Apparently briefed by Qirbi that A/S Burns intended to raise U.S. concerns over continuing Yemeni restrictions on the pouch and diplomatic support flights for Embassy Sanaa, Saleh pre-emptively raised the issue himself. He complained that U.S. insistence on importing large volumes of material and refusing to have it inspected was a violation of the Vienna Convention and a source of embarrassment for the ROYG. He fretted that Parliament and the opposition parties were aware of the issue and pressed the government not to sell out Yemeni sovereignty by acceding to these excessive U.S. demands.

111. (C) Saleh then offered a "solution." He said the ROYG would permit Embassy Sanaa to bring in anything it wished, as long as it is inspected first. He expanded on this theme, inviting the Embassy to import even secret/sensitive items -- e.g. "eavesdropping devices," "espionage equipment," weapons, explosives, bombs, rockets, cameras, computers, etc. -- but to cooperate with Yemeni authorities in doing so. Inspection of such "secret" items could be performed in a "locked room" with only a single Yemeni security official present, after which the items could be taken immediately to the Embassy compound. Inspection was unavoidable, however, and must occur in the airport -- i.e. on Yemeni soil -- rather than at

the Embassy, which was American soil and therefore outside the scope of Yemeni sovereignty and control.

112. (C) A/S Burns replied that the diplomatic support flight scheduled for the following day (10/5) would meet the President's concerns as it contained only five dip pouches -- which, by common assent, were non-inspectable -- and items of diplomatic cargo which were all inspectable. He asked that Yemeni authorities cooperate fully to make the 10/5 flight a shared success which could set the stage for future progress on this important bilateral issue. (Note: The 10/5 diplomatic support flight was off-loaded in record time with full Yemeni cooperation. End note.)

IRAQ

113. (C) At Saleh's request, A/S Burns provided an overview of current conditions and U.S. aims in Iraq. Reviewing themes covered in his recent meeting with GEN Abizaid (ref b), Saleh offered a range of "friendly" opinions and advice on Iraq: the Iraqi army should not have been disbanded; police and administrative responsibilities must be placed in Iraqi hands; that former soldiers and former Baathists must be given an economic stake; restoring security is a top priority, ahead of creating a model democracy; many opposition figures who arrived with coalition troops are not credible. A/S Burns expressed appreciation for FM Qirbi's helpful role in getting the Iraqi delegation seated in the Arab League and asked that Yemen maintain such a supportive posture.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE AND THE ROADMAP

114. (C) Saleh strongly urged the USG to press the parties for implementation of the roadmap, which he said would give the U.S. credibility with the Arab countries. He commented that by overthrowing Saddam Hussein, but refusing to work with Arafat, the U.S. was using a double standard. A/S Burns outlined the U.S. approach, stressing commitment to the roadmap and a two-state solution. President Saleh said Yemen is against Hamas, adding that Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan are all ready to press the Palestinians to stop the violence, but the U.S. must guarantee that Israel will stop the settlements. The A/S agreed that the Palestinians must have a sense of hope if the extremists are to be marginalized, but emphasized again that Palestinian performance on security is critically important. Saleh agreed and said that Yemen is ready to help and cooperate. He equated a Palestinian state with Israeli security. (Note: The meeting occurred prior to the 10/4/03 Haifa suicide bombing.)

ROYG-DPRK COOPERATION; SCUDS

115. (S/NF) In a brief private exchange with Saleh at the end of the meeting, A/S Burns underscored the importance of cutting off Yemeni cooperation with North Korea. Saleh said Yemen had taken the decision to do so, including the Houdeidah naval base, but discussions were underway regarding the "defective" SCUDs imported last winter (ref c). This could lead to either a North Korean refund payment to Yemen or possibly a DPRK technical team to visit Yemen and effect repairs. A/S Burns cautioned again that Yemen should limit all interaction with North Korea.

116. (U) This cable was cleared by NEA A/S Burns.
HULL